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A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT MILL-HILL CHAPEL,

IN LEEDS,

ON THE COMMENCEMENT

OF

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

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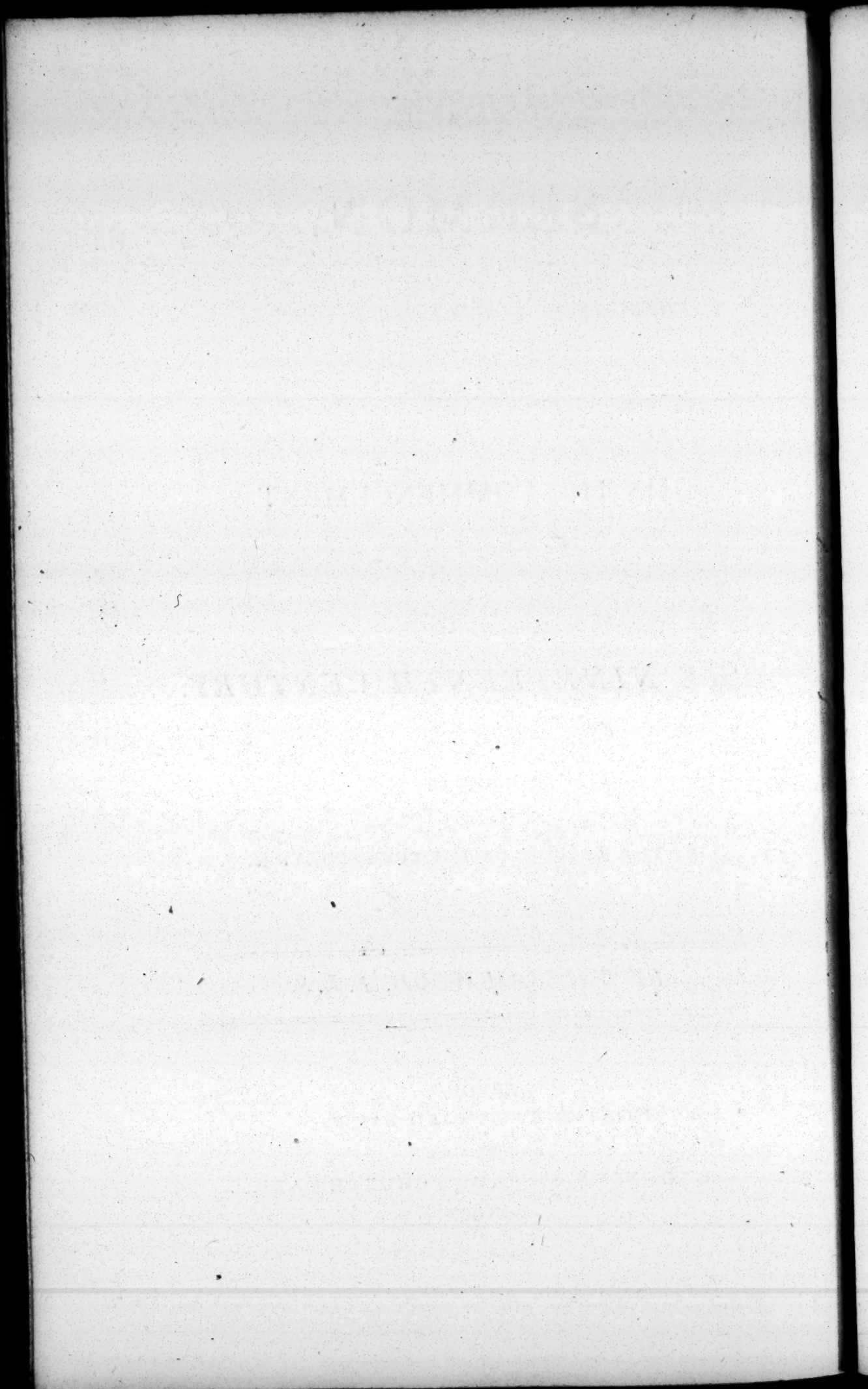
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A SERMON.

2 PET. iii. 8.

But, Beloved, be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a Thousand Years, and a Thousand Years as one Day.

DURATION is an idea so familiar to our minds, that we cannot conceive the possibility of its absence. Whatever exists, must exist in some time; whatever continues to exist, must be considered in connection with successive portions of time. When we apply the term to the Supreme Being, our conceptions of it are equally clear and satisfactory. We know what we mean when we say that God is eternal, or, in other words, that he always has been, is, and will never cease to be. But however plain, and even necessary this extension of the idea may be to our understanding, it is certainly too great to be grasped by our imagination. All the

powers of our minds sink under the weight of infinity. We can only wonder and adore when we contemplate a being which has ever flowed, and will for ever flow on, in one uniform course, unsusceptible of change, and unmeasured by any of the revolutions of which we are sensible. *With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.* With us the lapse of time is marked by a vast variety of different events, which diversify the state of our lives, and the appearance of the visible world around us. The current of our own ideas points out to us an evident distinction between the past, the present, and the future. But it does nothing more. Were we to judge only from our own sensations and reflections, we should be unable to estimate the real length of any given portion of time. No two of us would attribute to it the same duration. To the busy and the happy it would seem to have passed with a swiftness almost too great to be perceived. To the idle and the wretched it would appear to have moved with slow and lingering steps succeeding each other after long and tedious intervals.

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The all-wise and all-benevolent director of the universe has given us measures out of ourselves, independent of our own feelings and volitions, liable to no irregularity, always open to our observation, and forcing themselves upon our notice, whether we wish to attend to them or not. In all ages and in all countries, the real or apparent motions of the heavenly bodies have been employed, with more or less accuracy as mankind were more or less advanced in mental improvement, to divide time into fixed and regular periods. Such is the account given by the first historian of the world. *God said, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.*

The apparent course of the sun above our horizon from east to west, and return below it back again from west to east, determine the duration of what we call a *natural day*. In different seasons of the year there is indeed much difference in the distribution of light and darkness: but from the noon of one day to the noon of the next, there is always

so nearly the same interval as to afford a sufficient direction for the usual business of mankind, and at the same time such a minute diversity as requires the aid of close attention and patient labour to ascertain its laws with exactness. And in this manner has our Creator disposed all his gifts. Whatever is of strict necessity or of prime use, is freely distributed to all men without the need of much actual observation or diligence in themselves. But if they aspire to great improvement, or wish to approach perfection, they must exert all the powers of their minds, must pass many a studious hour, and watch over many a midnight lamp before they effect their purpose.

The waxings and waneings of the moon, the successive returns of its full splendour and of its total disappearance, afford us the means of fixing a longer term which we call a *month*.

The lengthening and shortening of alternate light and darkness; the apparent progress of the sun towards the north, and his constant return to the south; the change from winter to spring, from spring to summer,

mer, from summer to autumn, and from autumn to winter, mark out to us the divisions of our *year*; and as far as a few revolutions are concerned, it is easy to determine their length to a degree of precision sufficient for common purposes. But the numbers of the Almighty are not adapted to our method of reckoning. It is an arduous task to fix the exact limits of a year, and many ages had past before the observing few were able to solve the problem. Nor when it was actually done, could it be made to suit our simple numerals. The revolutions of the sun are not measured by entire days, hours, or minutes. It is not quite half a century since our English calendar was nearly adjusted to their fractional parts: and even still it is not entirely free from imperfection; but the defect is so small that no sensible inconvenience can arise from it in the space of several thousand years. Until the year 1752, we lost about two days in three centuries.

The full round of the seasons is the measure of that division of time by which we usually estimate the length of our lives. *The*

days of our years, says the Psalmist, are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is that strength labour and sorrow.

Our next period is that of a *century*. Its completion is not determined by any real or apparent motion of the heavenly bodies, nor by any other appearance of nature. It is entirely the creature of human invention. It has arisen from that easy and ready mode of numeration which was adopted by mankind in the earliest ages of the world. When the uninstructed patriarch had occasion to observe and to express a plurality of objects, he would spontaneously refer them to those divisions of the human hand which were in constant use and perpetually before his eyes. He would pass from one hand to another, would give to each individual number a distinct appellation, and would then begin again. Hence mankind universally reckon by tens in a constant progression. When they obtain ten tens, they reckon a hundred; and ten hundreds are a thousand.

In the calculation of time we familiarly speak of *centuries*. The distinction enables

us to determine the succession of events in the course of human affairs. But we seldom proceed farther. A thousand years is too long a term for the general current of our ideas to reach. Our lives are too short to be brought into comparison with it. Six of these protracted periods have not elapsed since the creation of the world.

We have lately witnessed the commencement of a new century. On the midnight of the thirty-first of last December, eighteen hundred years and one week, had, according to our received chronology, passed over since the birth of Christ. Whether this calculation be perfectly exact may be justly doubted; for the Christian world did not begin to date from the birth of Christ till more than five hundred years after that important event. But whether it be exact or not, is a matter of no consequence. It has been adopted near thirteen hundred years, and is productive of no material inconvenience in our historical researches. It assists our ideas and enables us to speak with precision. This is all which in general we expect from it. But may it not, ought it not to do more? Does not the termination of
every

every specified division of time call upon us to make a solemn pause in our pursuits, to consider what changes have characterized the past, and what are likely to be the lot of the future?

At the beginning of a new year we feel a certain hilarity of spirits: without considering that we have one year less to live, we rejoice that our lives have been preserved so long; we congratulate each other upon the occasion; and give expression to our benevolent affections in cordial good wishes that we may all enjoy many other similar anniversaries. But the arrival of a new century does not affect us in a similar manner. As none of us saw the beginning of that which is past, none of us hope to reach the end of that which is now begun. Since the first morn of the year seventeen hundred and one, how many have been born and have died? how few have attained to the age of threescore years and ten? what numbers have been cut off before the meridian of their days?

As not one of us has experienced the *whole* of a passing century, as few of us can
trace,

trace, from its beginning, even the *latter half* of that which is now over and gone, we cannot form an estimate of it from our own lives. We are obliged to refer it to the general history of our race, and to consider it as a large portion of time which has seen generations spring up and wither away; which has raised some to prosperity and glory, and sunk others into wretchedness and contempt; which has witnessed the rise and fall of kingdoms; and has brought forth changes, which have astonished all who beheld them, and will be felt in their effects by myriads yet unborn.

May it not then be as useful as it is curious to take a review of it as it has past, as it lives in our memory; or as we have read of it in the chronicles of former times? Who is not sensible of the improvements in knowledge and art to which it has given rise? What a splendour has burst out upon admiring Europe, which had never before been known? The ease and security of navigation, and of its constant attendant extensive commerce, have been wonderfully encreased. The course of a ship in the pathless ocean, its relative situation at any given

given time, and its distance from its destined port have been determined to a degree of precision, for the attainment of which, ample rewards were long offered, and which was once deemed scarcely possible. The impetuous lightning has been disarmed of its force, and compelled to pass harmless to the earth. The nature of air and water, their constituent parts, and their respective action upon each other, have been wonderfully unfolded and brought to the test of nearly decisive experiment. And have not numerous additions been thence made to the conveniences of life? Have not the means of preserving health, and of curing or alleviating disease, been better ascertained? And are not many operations now performed with a small degree of labour and expence, which once almost baffled human skill, and were too burdensome to be often attempted? Has not an aerial fluid lighter than the common atmosphere been discovered, by the means of which, man can associate with the fowls of heaven and soar above the clouds?

These, and others of a similar kind, are the gigantic advances of human intellect and human ingenuity in the progress of the
eighteenth

eighteenth century. But amidst these splendid achievements, have nations become wiser? Alas! I fear not. Is their conduct suitable to their encreased knowledge? Have they learnt to treat each other with greater integrity and honour? Are they become more faithful to their engagements, more sincere in their professions, and in all their negotiations attentive only to the common welfare? Have they discovered that a course of honest, peaceful industry is the only way to lasting prosperity, and the only source of real honour? Have they been taught that war is in all cases displeasing to God and hurtful to man; in the end, destructive alike to the victor and the vanquished; pleasing to none, but harpies who fatten on human blood?

Which of the nations of Europe can stand up in the presence of an all-seeing God and declare, *I have done all this: I have seen, and acted on the persuasion, that good faith and benevolence are the duty of neighbouring countries no less than of connected individuals. In the course of the last century, I have broken no treaty; I have been guilty of no deceit or concealment*

ment in any public transaction; I have not drawn the sword, or refused to sheath it when drawn, to profit by the distress of other nations, or to gratify the cravings of unrighteous ambition. Though nations never blush, not one of them, I am persuaded, will hazard so daring an assertion. From the beginning of 1701 to the end of 1800, our own nation has suffered under not less than forty-five years of actual war; and not one*

* The account stands thus:

	YEARS.
1. War of 1702, declared against France on the same day at London, Vienna, and the Hague, terminated on the part of England by a cessation of hostilities in the spring of 1712, which produced the treaty of Utrecht - - - -	10
2. Rebellion in the year 1715 - - -	1
3. War with Spain in 1718—19 - -	2
4. War with Spain, October, 1739, succeeded by a general European war in which England took a principal part, concluded by the general peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in October, 1748 - -	9
5. War declared against France in March,	1756

one third of the century has blessed Europe
at large with universal peace*. Europe, en-
lightened

1756, (though hostilities commenced in
America in 1753, but not taken to ac-
count) ended by the peace of Paris, Feb.
1763 - - - - - -

7

6. American war begun at Lexington, April
18, 1775, which extended to a war with
France, Spain, and Holland, till Novem-
ber, 1782 - - - - -

8

7. Hostilities against the French Republic,
in the summer of 1793, continued to the
end of the century - - - -

8

 45

In this calculation, no account is taken of the
quarrel with Spain in 1727, when Admiral Hosier
blocked up the Spanish galleons at Porto Bello, and
the Spaniards laid siege to Gibraltar; nor of the dis-
pute concerning Falkland Islands, &c.

* In the last year of the seventeenth century, a
war commenced between Sweden on one side, and
Russia, Denmark and Poland on the other, which
continued till the peace of Newstadt, in 1721. Dur-
ing more than half of this period the *succession*
war engaged nearly all the rest of Europe. An inter-
val of twelve years peace ensued, the longest of
which

lightened Europe, which raises its head
above the other quarters of the globe, and
boasts

which the eighteenth century can boast, till 1733, when the death of Augustus II. produced a new continental war which ended in 1735. Peace was scarcely established when a war broke out between the Russians and Turks, which terminated in 1738. In 1739, hostilities commenced between England and Spain, which soon involved Prussia, Austria, France, and Holland. The treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, 1748, produced a general peace. From that time to the war of 1756, there is an interval of peace of eight years, though in the latter three years the French and the English were in a state of actual hostility in North America, and during nearly the whole of it, were opposed to each other in the East Indies as allies to the different country powers. The peace of Paris gave repose to Europe for five years. In 1768, the Russians and Turks were again at war till 1774. In 1775, began the American war, and soon after the general war in the south-west of Europe, which terminated in 1782. In 1787, a new war broke out between Russia and Turkey, in which Austria, Denmark and Sweden were for some time engaged; it was concluded by a peace between Russia and Turkey, the last of the belligerent powers, in 1791. From that time all the south of Europe has been in a flame kindled by the French revolution, and the conflagration seems likely to extend to the north.

The

boasts a high pre-eminence in genius, science and art—enlightened Europe is the common

The peace account of the eighteenth century, therefore, stands thus :

	YEARS.
1. Interval between the peace of Newstadt in 1721, and the war produced by the death of Augustus II. 1733 - - -	12
2. Interval between the peace of 1735, and the war between Russia and Turkey in 1736 - - - - -	1
3. Interval between the peace of 1738, and the war between England and Spain in 1739 - - - - -	1
4. Interval between the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, and the war of 1756 -	8
5. Interval between the peace of Paris in 1763, and the war between Russia and the Turks in the spring of 1768 - -	5
6. Interval between the peace of July, 1774, and the commencement of the American war in 1775 - - - -	1
7. Interval between the general peace of 1782, and the war of the Russians and	

B

Turks

reigneth;—HE is able to bring good out of evil; HE will cause the angry passions of man to shew forth his praise, and promote the purposes of his government. Of the vast schemes of his providence, *we* know only a little. He sees from the beginning to the end, and takes in at one view the immensity of time and space. *With him one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* He proceeds in a regular, though to us imperceptible manner, and, by methods known only to his infinite wisdom, is bringing the mighty plan to its full perfection. Though century after century, mankind may lament the want of a visible progress, if we look back to the distance of two thousand years, we shall find an evident change. The state of the world, and the general character of its inhabitants, are now much better than they were at the birth of **Christ**. Though nations learn wisdom by slow degrees, and often appear to forget what they have learnt, there is still a real advance. The captive in war is not now slaughtered in cold blood, or reduced to the wretched condition of a slave for life. The peaceful husbandman and mechanic are not now confounded with those who have

been taken in arms. The helpless and harmless woman and child are not treated as active foes. The fallen monarch no longer slowly follows the triumphal car of the haughty victor, loaden with chains, and overwhelmed with the sad reflection of what he once was. The unqualified lust of conquest is not now boldly avowed as the sole inducement to war. Whatever be the real motive, more plausible pretexts are studiously formed, and the scourges of the world affect a virtue, if they have it not. And though century after century may still roll on, before the earth shall be blessed with perpetual peace, still the day will arrive when the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of God and of his Christ; when *men shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks*; when desolation shall no longer stalk over ravaged fields, and the garment rolled in blood shall no more be washed in widows and orphans' tears.

In the mean time, be it ours to contribute our own part towards the reformation of mankind. This happy age we shall not live to see. Over the fate of nations we
have

have no controul. But each of us may correct his own errors ; each of us may cultivate a spirit of peace ; all of us may learn to love each other as God in Christ Jesus has loved us. Our days are only a span, and *we pass our years as a tale that is told*. To-day we are here, and to-morrow we are no more seen. But we depend on a being *with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*. The Almighty Being who created us, can raise us from the dead, and make us partakers of everlasting life. He has promised that if we love him, and keep his commandments, death shall not retain his dominion over us. By the resurrection of his well-beloved Son, *he has begotten us again to a lively hope of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. Let us, then, *while it is called to-day, attend to the things which belong to our everlasting peace*. Let us live to God, to our own consciences, to the esteem of the wise and good, and then we shall not live in vain. Years may swiftly come and go ; nations may rise or fall ; the earth may experience war or peace, may yield or withhold her usual fruits ; but in all cases our best interests will be secure : time cannot change

change them ; the commotions of the world cannot disturb them ; a dearth of every thing beside cannot diminish them ; the conquering sword cannot take them from us. If we fear God we may banish all other fear. If the rock of ages become our support, by what can we be moved ? If we depend upon unchanging truth, how can we be deceived ? If we have the infinite fullness of the divine nature to supply our necessities, what can we want ? If we have the assurance of an immortal existence, how can we be affected by time or chance ?

THE END.

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